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LETTER

Out of the
COUNTRY,

To the
CLERGY

In and About
The City of London.

THO you are as wise as *Serpents*, and not altogether as innocent as *Doves*; yet since the *Glory of God*, the *Good* of your own *Souls*, the *Prosperity* of the *Church*, and the *Peace* and *Safety* of this *Nation* does require it, we will make bold to speak to you in few words, what others, who have less Esteem for your Vocation, do inculcate in harsher terms, and with much higher Strains of Rhetorick. We know that most of you are Men of no contemptible *Learning*, and undoubted *Ablities*, for the Work of the Ministry; to which, God of his Bountie hath added, large *Preferments*, crowded *Auditories*, great *Reputation* abroad, and much greater *Expectations* of further *Advancement* at home; so that nothing but

A Integrity

Integrity can be wanting, to render you the most *happy* and most *considerable* Men in the World. But when we reflect upon the Ways and Means by which you raise your selves to this *Grandeur*, and continue your selves in it, and compare 'em with those your selves made use of in the *late Reigns*, we have great Reason to suspect, that *That one thing necessary* is wanting to those who abound in all others, to their own *Shame*, and to the unconceivable *Damage* of the Church of God. We know very well, what *Articles* you have *subscribed*; by what *Canons* you are bound, to what *Laws* you owe *Obedience*, and what Great Things most of you have spoken, in the late Reigns, of the excellent *Constitutions* of the Church of England, as it is still by Law established amongst us. We therefore justly wonder, what secret Influence has turn'd the Tide of your Affections; for we observe not only an Abatement of your Zeal, but a very sensible Ostentation of that Abatement, and that you not only seem to affect and court the Name of *moderate Men*, but pursue it by such Methods as we cannot conceive to be at all consistent with the *Sincerity* of the *Christian Religion*. For (not to mention any thing that belongs to the *Civil State*) in the very Church of God we find the Name of *Moderation* is hunted after by these following Arts.

1. Some of you seldom or never will venture to use any Arguments to convince *Dissenters* of the Lawfulness and Excellency of those *Constitutions* to which your selves have subscribed; but passing that by as *useless* (or rather as *dangerous*) you run into General Proofs and Commendations of the Christian Religion, Exhortation to Virtue, or Encomiums of some particular Great Person or Government; and so dismiss your Congregation, with the general Applause of all the Hearers, as well of those who love our Church, as of those who are disaffected to it. We know also, that very specious Reasons are urged by your Friends for this kind of *Trimming Behaviour*. They say, That it is your Duty rather to preach *practical* than *controversial* Points; that raising at *Dissenters* frights those from the Church which otherwise might sometimes drop into it; that it argues *Passion* and *Choler*, to dive into the Faults of others; and that *Liberty* covers a multitude of Sins. But pray satisfy your own Consciences, whether the Convincing Men of the Necessity and Benefit of coming to the Publick Liturgies and Sacraments of our Church, is not the teaching them a practical Duty? Whether *needless Separation* is not a Crime in *Abolish*? and, Whether God has set you over his Church to convince Men of Criminal Errors, or rather to *connive* at them? Some of you have ascended the *Episcopal*. I will not say the *Metropolitan Chair*, (and all would do it as soon as you could) do you think *Presbyterian Ordination* as valid as your own? If you do, With what Face can you take the Revenues of an *Episcopal Chair*, that signifies no more than a Joint-Stool, if *Presbyterian Ordination* is as valid as *Episcopal*; for Jurisdiction is communicable, and in our Church is actually communicated to the Order of Presbyters, as well as to the *Episcopal Chair*; and then, as St. Jerome says. What does the Bishop besides *Ordination* more than the *Presbyter*? If you think the *Ordination*

of the *Presbytery* not so valid as the *Episcopal*, why are you afraid to speak of it in the Pulpit, and admonish your Flocks not to go to those *Pastors* who have no Legal *Authority* committed to them. This is only an Exhortation to a *Practical Duty*, and such a Duty too, as belongs to Men, not as *Men*, (as Charity, Justice, and Temperance) but as *Christians*, lying under an Obligation to Catholick Communion. Suppose you could prevail with your People, to come constantly to the Prayers of our Church, to join there with true and fervent Devotion, and to receive frequently the holy Communion, with Prostration of Soul and Body; would not this be the most practical Exercise of Christianity? introductory to Charity, and all other Virtues, that spring from a genuine Piety? If touching upon *Controversies* be criminal, How can you defend your Heats against *Papery* in the late Reign? or, how are you not afraid to offer at any Proof of the Christian Religion, or Vindication of the Doctrine of the *Holy Trinity*, which is controverted by the *Jews*, *Thiists*, *Pagans*, and *Socinians*? The Question is only this, Whether it is a Duty for all to join in Communion with our Church or no? If it be not, why do you continue in it? If it is a Duty, why are you so shy to let your People know it? Perhaps you will say, enough has been said upon that Subject already, and by some of your own Party published to the World; and we as easily answer, That enough has been published to the World about Justice, Charity, Mercy, or any other practical Subject you can choose; and therefore why do you continue to preach upon them, but because those that come to hear you do not know all that has been said or written upon those Subjects? Whilst the Law of Man was severe against Dissenters, most of you, we remember, were pleas'd in the Pulpits to be severer against Dissenters than the Laws themselves; and pray why so mute now? The Relaxation of a humane Penalty remits nothing of the *Divine Obligation*, of Submission to the Church of God. Perhaps you will say this is the best way to convince *Dissenters*, and bring 'em over to the Church; but how should Men come over to the Church, when they never hear you so much as once call to them? for ought they hear from you, they may as securely stay where they are (provided they pay *Tithes* and *Contributions*), as come over to you. As for what you pretend against *Railing*, viz. that it frights Men from the Church, we agree with you, that whether it has that Effect or no, all *Railing* is to be avoided, as repugnant to the meek Spirit of Christianity. But still *Arguing* is no *Railing*, and Preaching the *Truth* is no Injury to those that live in *Error*. The *Apostles* argued against the *Deities* of the *Pagans*, the *Ceremonies* of the *Jews*, the *Corruptions* of the *Pharisees*; yet they were no more guilty of *Railing*, than *Michael* the *Archangel* when he contested with the *Devil* about the Body of *Moses*. To rail at any Man, is to ascribe Immorality to him; and thus they only rail at *Dissenters*, who ascribe their Separation to wilful Malice, Revenge, Hypocrisy, or some vicious Habit of Mind, which is known to God, but latent from the Sons of Men. We are therefore so far from abetting any *railing*

against *Dissenters*, that we condemn all *uncharitable Censures* in the very Mind, and choose rather to believe that they are led into a *needless Separation*, by *Prejudices of Education, Weakness of Judgment, Want of due Information*, or *Attention to better Instruction*: and therefore wonder you are afraid of using solid Arguments to those whom we presume willing to be convinced by the Word of God. Some of their Teachers are not favourable to you, notwithstanding your Silence; they teach their Members to call you *Lambs of Antichrist, Sons of the Whore of Babylon, Papists in Masquerade*, and other opprobrious Names, which a wise or modest Man would be ashamed to mention. If therefore they continue to be so vocal, and you to be so mute; if the common People daily perceive their Zeal in opposing the Church, and your Coldness and Indifference in the Defence of it; it is no wonder if they incline to that Party which speaks and acts most in its own Defence. We know indeed at this time of the day, if you should speak all that you are able to alledge in the Commendation of the *Established Church* (which God continue longer than you or we deserve) it would very much *thin* your *Congregations*, and diminish no small part of the *Lecturer's* Income: For if the *Fat Alderman* or *Common-Council Man*, that sleeps all the time of the Prayers, should happen to awake whilst you are touching on those Points, no doubt but he would remember to make some Deduction for it at the *Quarter-day*, or the *Christening* of the next Child. But what then? Must God always give place to *Mammon*? or think you that all Mankind is so blinded, that none perceive that herein you seek your *own* and not the things of *Jesus Christ*. You value yourselves upon *crowded Congregations*, and are not a little puff'd up, that many who go to a *Meeting* one part of the Day, will come to hear you on the other. This you call bringing *Dissenters* to Church: But in what Sense can these Men be said to be brought to Church? If you mean, they are brought to stand within the *Walls* of the *Building* of the Church, so they were in *Oliver's* time, nay within the very *Pulpit*, and yet sworn at the same time to destroy the *old Church of England*. *Dissenters* are then brought to Church, when they are convinced of the *Necessity* and *Expediency* of *Episcopal Government*, the *Lawfulness*, *Convenience*, and *Plenitude* of the *established Liturgy*, the *Beauty* and *Innocence* of our received *Ceremonies*, and the *Sinfulness* of making *needless Separation* from their *lawful Rulers* in Christ, otherwise their coming to hear you *Preach* brings 'em not one step nearer Church than they were before; for they hear little or nothing of the Church in it: nay your *Silence* confirms their *Prejudice*, and gives that Opportunity to the Growth of *Independency*, that there is some Danger the Majority may (like their *Brethren* in Scotland) declare it *most agreeable to the Inclinations of this Kingdom*; and then farewell to all *Beauty, Order, and Unity* of Religion in this Nation. We will not urge, that your selves may lose your *Preferments* by the Bargain, tho' it be *Argumentum ad hominem*, because you may perhaps find out some *Expedient* to give them; but this we say, That whilst you engross the best *Preferments* of the Church to your selves, and

curry Favour with *Dissenters* by affected Silence, you act like some of our *Common Lawyers*, who take Fees of one Party to *speak*, and from the other to hold their *Tongues*; and in plain terms, be it spoken with all due Submission to your Learned Gravities, you do little better than cheat the Church of her Money.

Secondly, Another Artifice we condemn in you, is that disrespect you take care to shew to the *Publick-Prayers* of the Church, which is like tipping the Wink upon the *Dissenters*, to let them understand, that tho' you have *subscrib'd* to the *Liturgy*, yet you have as little respect for it in your Hearts, as the most Zealous of their own Party. Some of you never vouchsafe to read the *Prayers*, tho' by *Law* required at certain times to do it. Others shut your Selves up in the *Vestry*, thinking it less Scandal to be found there with a *Glass* and a *Pipe*, than to be seen at the *Solemn Worship* of their God. Others, after the *Prayers* of the Church are ended, begin a long *Hearings* of your own, which is as much as to say, Beloved, you have been praying to God a long time in a dull formal way, let us now begin to praise God better. Others of you called to visit the Sick, humour the Dying Man with a long *Extemporary Effusion*, and send him out of the World, well pleased with the *Gifts* and *Abilities* of the Minister, but more than ever *disaffected* to the *Rules* and *Methods* practis'd by the Church in that Office. These Methods of *Popularity* we look upon as *Impious*, because to *Pleasure Men* God himself is *offended*, weak Members of his Church *scandalized*, the stronger much *disgusted*, and a wide Door thereby set open for *Enthusiasm* or *Atheism*, or both together to rush in upon us. For the first you plead length of the *Prayers*, weakness of Body, multitude of Hearers, and the like Impediments of *Flesh and Blood*. These we are willing to allow, to some of you, and at some Times, but that they should be extended to so many, and so constantly, as we see they are, we can see no Reason, that is founded upon the Word of God. We think that offering up the *Prayers* of the Congregation, is one of the most noble Offices of the Priesthood, of which few are worthy, and none can be too great for it. Your constant throwing that Office upon those of your Brethren, who as well for want of *Abilities* as *Preference*, are least regarded in the Church, makes you indeed look Great in the Eyes of the Common People, who are generally apt to worship those, who most of all worship themselves; but take heed it does not render you Little in the Eyes of God, who cannot but be angry at those who by such *Artifices*, steal away the Hearts of the People from his *Solemn and Publick Worship*. It is true indeed, that by drawing the Affections of the People, from the *Prayers* to the *Sermon*, your Churches are more thronged, your Persons more admired, and sometimes your Bays better filled, than they would be by a conscientious discharge of your Duty, according to *Law* and *Cannon*. But how in the mean time is God served, when his People are enticed from *Practise* to *Speculation*, from *Religion* in the End, to *Religion* in the Means, from the Adoration of God to the Admiration of Men? You pretend a necessity of shutting your Selves up in the *Vestry*, during the time of the *Prayers*,

to prepare your Selves to deliver your Sermon with more Grace, *memoriter* ! But this is an Excuse more becoming a *School-Boy*, than a *Grave Divine*. They whose Brains are so shattered by the *Prayers*, that they must needs forget the *Sermon*, ought not to venture at all upon such an hazardous Performance : Nor can he think to do more good, by a *florid Sermon*, than he is sure to do ill, by so bad an *Example*. To make the *Applause of Men*, that are most taken with Circumstances that are least significant, the end of Preaching, is *Boysish* in those that know no better, and *Impious* in those that do. St. Paul advises the *Corinthians* to be Followers of him, but if your Congregations should be Followers of you, they must follow you into the *Vestry*, and leave the Service of God to the poor *Curate*, who is paid in this World but very little for it. You please *Disasters* by such Behaviour, and they in gratitude will come to your *Sermons*, but in the mean time you displease those who are best affected to Religion, and to gain one *Enemy*, you drive away a thousand *Friends*. The Truth is, since such vast Care has been taken to make Men in love with the Circumstances of Religion, such as are *florid Language*, *abstruse Notions*, *affected Gestures*, and *Memoriter Predications*, we have lost the Substance of Religion, which consists in *Piety to God* and *good Works towards Man*. You have tickled an *Itch*, that rather ought to be cured, and whilst you have made your Selves Great by Preaching, you have rendred Religion Little, by reducing it to one Predicament, of hearing and applauding Sermons. As for those of you, who perhaps vouchsafe to be present at the *Prayers* of the Church, but endeavour to blot them out as it were with a *Sponge*, by some *extemporary Effusions* of their own, we desire such Men to consider, that tho this may please some People extremely, because it seems harder to *invent* than to *read*, yet hereby you serve your Selves, and not the Church of God : For hereby you teach your Hearers, a *Looseness* in Divine Worship, a *Contempt* of established *Liturgies*, a *Saucy Familiarity* with God, and prepare 'em for the *Extravagancies* of Mr. *Burgess*, the *Heats* of Mr. *Lobb*, and the *Inspirations* of Mr. *Pen*, that *transcendent Animal*, whom none could ever yet reduce to its proper Species.

A Third Artifice we condemn in you, is the *Zeal* and *Forwardness* some of you shew, when called to be *Members* of a *Convocation*, or to a higher Station in the Church, for *Alterations* in our *Liturgy* and *Cannons*, and making us a new Religion, better suited to the vitiated *Pallates* of this present Age. We are not *averse* to *reasonable* and *necessary Reformation*s, and heartily wish it lay in the *Clergy's Power*, without *Lay-Assistance* to make themselves the purest Church, not only that is in the World (for that we hope you think your Selves already) but that possibly can be in it.

And, First, We wish that the Church had Power of *choosing*, and in case of *Misdemeanour* or *Heresy*, of *deposing* her own *Bishops*, according to ancient Custom and Canon, that so it might not longer be in the Power of a *Prince*, to give us those for our *Spiritual Leaders* who are whole *Papists* or half *Fanatics*.

Secondly, We wish that the *Bishops* might enjoy as much *Authority*, as at least is derived from them, and that the Name of Power might not be given the *Bishop*; whilst the Power itself is in the Hand of a *Lay-Chancellor*.

Thirdly, We should be glad to see our *Church* emancipated from the Slavery of the *Secular Power*, and those *enslaving Preliminaries* unto which our *Convocations* are (by a *Law of Man* that has no great Foundation on the *Law of God*) made to be subject. But these *Alterations* for the benefit of the *Church*, you never venture so much as to mention; for if you should, you must never expect to be invited to preach at *White-Hall* or before the *House*, or if you were, you might expect the same Thanks for your Sermons, as *Salisbury-Burnet* received for his *Pastoral Letter*. But there are Alterations of another Nature, that tend to *despoil the Church*, and make it look like Mr. *Burges's* *Conventicle*, of which you are very zealous, and if the *Dissenters* prove as grateful to you as to King *James*, what wonderful *Addresses of Thanks* may you expect from them. Because *Dissenters* will not come over to the *Church*, how industrious are many of you to carry the *Church* over to them? And yet we believe you would hardly undertake such a Gigantick Task, if you had not some prospect of being well paid for your Labour: For we observe many *Zealous* for such pretended Amendments now, who have expressed as much *Heat* against them in another Reign. And pray inform us, what benefit we can expect by any *Alteration* of our *Liturgy*, without a total *Ablation* of it? Can we expect to frame Prayers that please those who are dissatisfied with the *Lord's Prayer*, and exclude it the *Publick Worship*? Will the taking away the *Ceremonies* reconcile a *Presbyterian*, and much less an *Independent*, to *Episcopal Ordination* or to *Episcopal Government*? You make long Harangues upon the Benefits of *Unity*: And for the sake of this *Unity*, our *Prayers* must be alter'd to bring in the moderate *Presbyterian*; our *Episcopacy*, for the hot *Independent*; and pray why not our *Baptism* renounced to please the *Baptists*; our *Creed* taken away or expounded by your own Party to bring in the *Socinian*; and then you want nothing but the *Atheists* (for why should not some regard be had to them, since their Numbers are so considerably increased) to make up a complete *Unity* of the *Brethren in Iniquity*, which this ungodly Age has spawn'd upon us. If the *Dissenters* are the grieved Party, and desirous of *Unity*, why do they not first propound their own Terms, that we may consider of them? else what Obligations lies upon us, to make a Door into our *Church*, at which we are not sure that any one Person will enter. One of you would have a new Translation of the *Psalms*; another is very eager to kick out *Tobias* and his *Dog*; another thinks the *Collects* not long enough; and a fourth would have them a little shorter. Some of you discern abundance of *Superstition* in the Office for the *Dead*; another says it all lies in *Matrimony*; and a third believes that if the *Sign* of the *Cross* was taken from our *Rubrick*, and the *Doctrine* of the *Cross* from our *Religion*, it would then suit well enough with the Palates of all Men. But alas! you may take away all these things from the *Church*, and as many more, and yet if you leave any of the old

*Building standing, or dig not up the very Foundation, you will bring but very few Dissenters to a Union with us. — They expect nothing from you, but that you should *Clip your Religion* by degrees, till you *Clip away* all its *Worth and Beauty*, and render it innoxious to Conscience, as to occasion (like our Coin) its being called in, by a Royal Proclamation. We know you ingratiate your Selves by these Methods, not only into popular *Estimates*, but into higher *Favours*, which shall not here be mentioned. But we accuse your *Sincerity*, that can *subscribe* to and *sublist* by a *Church*, which you *sacrifice* as fast as you can, to your own *Interest*, and the *Honours* of a *giddy Mob*, that never yet approved those things which in themselves are most excellent. You know that such *Alterations* will first render *Episcopacy* useless, (for what need is there of any one to keep the *Cannons*, when you hardly leave them any *Cannons* to keep) and then destroy it.*

But perhaps you think it may last out your own Time, and are of *Nerve's* Mind.

Thus I leave you *in the Power*

If there are your Sentiments, it is in vain to add more: if they are not, we hope you will use your excellent Parts and Learning, which we much admire, more to the *Honour of Religion*, and the *Glorious* of your *Great Creator*. Which is the Hearty Desire of

Your Country Friends,

A. B. C. D. &c.

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